



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs  
Meeting Summary Minutes  
October 18th, 2011**

**I. Call to Order & Introductions:** Bill Gray, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). Bill asked for all present to stand for a moment of silence for all of those who have given their lives and those who have been wounded for our country in the different conflicts in which our country has been engaged and to remain standing for the Pledge of Allegiance.

**II. Approval of Minutes:** Rich Fales, Commissioner, made a motion to accept the September Meeting Summary Minutes as written. Carl Bedell, Commissioner, seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the September Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva).

**III. Role of the Maryland National Guard (MDNG) Transition Assistance Advisor ~ Howard Hodges (ARNG Ret.), Maryland Transition Assistance Advisor**

Transition Assistance Advisors (TAA) primarily support uniformed service members and their families by ensuring they understand the services available through the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) and the military health system. Additionally, TAAs coordinate resources for these members and their families with the myriad of service programs provided by the VA, TRICARE, Veterans Service Organizations and other supporting agencies. They also coordinate with Family Support Specialists and Employer Support Groups regarding entitlements through the VA programs. In addition to facilitating services between the service members/families and the federal, state and local agencies, TAAs also participate in councils and ad-hoc groups to resolve entitlement and benefit issues for the National Guard family.

Every state has one TAA (nine states have two due to the volume of military and veteran residents) as well as U.S. territories including Guam and Puerto Rico. Howard Hodges is the TAA for the state of Maryland. He uses a variety of resources from the Federal, State, County and community to assist National Guard, Reservists, and their families. He is currently developing a listing of all non-government organizations in Maryland that provide services to military service members, veterans and their families. Howard discussed the following support services that are available for National Guard members and their families:

- Military OneSource: Free service provided by the Department of Defense (DoD) to service members and their families to help with a broad range of concerns including money management, spouse employment and education, parenting and child care, relocation, deployment, reunion, and the particular concerns of families with special-needs members. They can also include more complex issues like relationships, stress, and grief. Services are available 24 hours a day – by telephone with professionally trained consultants and online.
- ARNG Yellow Ribbon Program: Training, resources and services to help service members and their families plan ahead for deployment and/or mobilization. National Guard mandates that its members attend, and family members are encouraged to attend as well. Children can participate in events where childcare and children and youth programs are provided.

- [National Guard Family Program](#): Offer the following services and programs for service members, spouses, parents and youth: financial and household support, emotional support, health benefits, family readiness, child care assistance, and children and youth camps.
- [Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve](#): A DoD organization that promotes cooperation and understanding between Reserve component members and their civilian employers and to assist in the resolution of conflicts arising from an employee's military commitment.
- [National Guard "Partners in Care"](#): An initiative of the Maryland National Guard Joint Force Headquarters Chaplain's office. The purpose is to coordinate support for Maryland National Guard members and their families through partnerships with local faith communities. Every County has at least one church or synagogue with a chaplain that provides services to National Guard members regardless of their denomination. The Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) is looking to copy the program.
- [Psychological Health Program National Guard Bureau](#): Provide education to support overall wellness, support for family members and friends, and help to address the full range of personal, emotional and behavioral problems as a result of deployment and any other stressors.
- [Operation Military Kids](#): Provide access to youth programs and support services where military children live.
- [Military Family Life Consultant Program](#): Provide personal financial counseling to help you and your family manager your finances, resolve financial problems and reach long-term goals such as education expenses, buying a home and planning for retirement.
- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#): A 24-hour, toll-free, confidential suicide prevention hotline available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. The Lifeline's national network of local crisis centers, provide crisis counseling and mental health referrals day and night.

The Post 9/11 GI Bill recently was updated to include the following benefits:

- Expands eligibility for members of the National Guard to include time served on Title 32 or in the full-time Active Guard and Reserve (AGR).
- A new (reduced) housing stipend for online (distance) learners enables active-duty servicemembers and their GI Bill eligible spouses to receive the annual \$1,000 book stipend, adds several vocational, certification and OJT options, and removes the state-by-state tuition caps for veterans enrolled at public (state-operated) colleges and universities.
- Servicemembers with six years of active duty service, with a commitment to serve an additional four years, may transfer benefits to their spouse.
- Servicemembers with over ten years of service may transfer benefits to a child.

Paula Matuskey, Commissioner, reported that Montgomery College is in the process of certifying non-credit programs that would be of interest to veterans to qualify for the GI Bill.

The National Institute of Mental Health is currently conducting a five-year \$50 million study and statistical analysis of suicide in the Army. Suicide rates are four times higher for females. There is a new issue of young recruits committing suicide prior to deployment. There are several factors and variables that may be at fault, including the reduced requirements for admission acceptance into several military branches. Howard noted that only 33% of youth today qualify to be accepted in the military.

Howard can be reached on his cell at 410-370-6916 (V) or via e-mail at [howard.hodges@us.army.mil](mailto:howard.hodges@us.army.mil).

#### **IV. Update on Veterans Collaborative – Rich Schiffauer, Commissioner**

Rich reported that the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the VA and Montgomery County has been finalized and signed off on by both parties. Rich will be meeting with Dr. Maria Llorente, Assoc. Chief of Staff for Mental Health VA Hospital, to discuss arrangements. With the MOU, a Homeless Outreach Worker and a Veterans Justice Outreach Worker will be available one day a week to assist veterans at the County's Crisis Center at 1301 Piccard Drive in Rockville. Data will be collected as to the number of veterans that seek services and the types of services that are requested. Telemental health services will not be provided at this time, but may in the future based on need.

A [Military and Veterans Resource Fair](#) is being held on Saturday, November 5<sup>th</sup> from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at White Flint Mall. Easter Seals will be sponsoring the event. 37 vendors are currently signed up to participate. Vendors do not have to pay a fee to have a table. The Commission will also have a table and Commissioners are invited to help staff it. The event is currently being advertised on the Commission's website and the Network of Care website. The event will also be featured on the County's homepage. MDVA will provide a link to the event flyer on their site. The event flyer has been sent via e-mail to various distribution lists. Rich is also working to have a notice printed in the Gazette.

The Collaborative is currently drafting a survey that will be sent to veterans, military service members, active duty, army reservists, and their families to collect data regarding their needs. The survey will be available online at Survey Monkey as well as hard copy to be mailed out. The survey will be handed out at the resource fair and distributed to all points of contacts for all services, guard and reserve units. Commissioners are invited to provide input.

#### **V. Chair and Vice Chair Report – Bill Gray and Jerry Godwin**

On October 9<sup>th</sup>, Bill Gray, Chair, spoke to the Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A. at Leisure World in Rockville about the Commission on Veterans Affairs. Many attendees were WWII veterans.

County Executive Isiah Leggett sent a letter to Bill thanking him for the Commission's 2011 Annual Report. In regards to the Commission's advocacy efforts for the establishment of a Veterans Court, Leggett reported that the Circuit Court is not able at this time establish such a court. He is in full support of the initiative being carried out by the Criminal Justice Behavioral Health Initiative to pilot a diversion program for those with mental illnesses who find themselves involved in the criminal justice system. Leggett suggested that the Commission research grants available through the Federal Department of Health and Human Services. Rich Fales, Commissioner, reported that the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) has, in the past, had grants available for developing and expanding behavioral health treatment courts, but only one grant is available per state. It is unclear at this time whether this grant will be funded for Fiscal Year 2013. Lorrie Knight-Major, Commissioner, noted that Baltimore County is currently drafting a grant proposal for this particular grant.

The Veterans Day Planning Workgroup is finalizing the program for the [Veterans Day unveiling/dedication of Veterans Plaza artwork](#) being held November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011, at 11:00 a.m. at the Silver Spring Civic Building. A number of organizations will have tables set up to provide information. The Commission will also have a table. Commissioners were asked to help staff the table.

The County is hosting a Homeless Resource Event on Wednesday, October 19<sup>th</sup> at Bohrer Park in Gaithersburg from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Participants will be assessed and evaluated. The event will provide a variety of support services include medical screenings, legal services, financial counseling, tax assistance and more. Children activities will be available. Transportation and lunch will be provided to participants. The Commission will have a table along with the Department of Health and

Human Services (DHHS), Aging and Disability Services (ADS). Rich Schiffauer, Bill Gray, and Carly Clem, Staff, will be staffing the table along with an ADS intake worker. The VA will also be present.

DHHS is hosting a public forum on budget priorities for FY13. The Commission may submit written testimony. Commissioners can e-mail Betsy with budget priority suggestions.

The County Council will be hosting a special briefing on November 17<sup>th</sup> on veterans issues and veterans homelessness. The Council will be evaluating how DHHS conducts their intakes, how they evaluate whether an individual is a veteran or not, and how services are provided. Attendees will include individuals from MDVA, Bill Gray, and Uma Ahluwalia, Director, DHHS.

## **VI. Updates / Motions for Commission Action**

None.

## **VII. Roundtable**

Clayton Smith, Veterans Service Officer, MDVA, introduced himself. He is a VA benefits counselor working in Prince George's, Montgomery, Howard, and Anne Arundel Counties. His office is based in Prince George's County Department of Family Services in Camp Springs, Maryland. He works in Montgomery County on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday of the month at the MontgomeryWorks Wheaton office. Veterans are seen on a first come, first served basis. He has worked with inmates at the Maryland Correctional Institution – Jessup to assist in filing their VA claims prior to their release. Clayton can be reached at 301-248-0463 (V). It was asked if Clayton could track the number of veterans he works with and which counties they are from. He currently keeps a sign in log, but does not separate phone calls by County. Jane McCarthy, Commissioner, made a motion for the Commission to write a letter to County Executive Isiah Leggett asking for Clayton's hours to be increased to one day a week in Montgomery County. J. Mauri Hamilton, Commissioner, seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the motion was unanimously passed.

Lorrie Knight-Major, Commissioner, noted that Rebuilding Together recently completed its 1,000<sup>th</sup> Heroes at Home Project in the D.C. area. First Lady Michelle Obama, Vice President Joe Biden and his wife Jill Biden were in attendance to celebrate the milestone. The Heroes at Home program aims to improve the lives of American military families by making necessary repairs, improvements or modifications to their homes. The only requirement is that the individual must own the home or the military service member or veteran is living in the home of someone who is their caregiver. The program also offers assistance to widows and widowers of deceased military service members and veterans.

TCP Potomac at Avenel Farm recently contacted Betsy Luecking, Staff, in regards to a volunteer project. Betsy frequently coordinates volunteer projects with various organizations. In September, the Home Builders Care Foundation landscaped the yard of Gold Star mother Paula Davis, whose son Justin Davis was killed in Afghanistan.

**Adjournment:** 7:30 p.m.

### **Next Full Commission Meeting:**

Tuesday, November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011, from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at 401 Hungerford Drive, Rockville in the 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Tan Conference Room.

Respectively submitted:

Carly Clem, OSC

Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison